



# The VOICE of Albertans with Disabilities

July 1, 2025

## Tips for Enjoying Parks, Festivals & Travel with a Disability

Summer in Alberta is full of adventure—but for individuals with disabilities, planning ahead can make the season safer, more inclusive, and more enjoyable. Here are some key tips for navigating parks, events, and travel:

### Accessible Parks & Outdoor Fun

**Use Alberta Parks' Accessibility Resources:** Many provincial parks now list accessibility features online, including wheelchair-accessible trails, adapted washrooms, and beach mats.



**Plan ahead for terrain:** Bring mobility aids like all-terrain wheelchairs or scooters for uneven paths.

**Accessible Picnic Sites:** Sites like Rundle Park or Gold Bar Park in Edmonton offer accessible tables and washroom access—call ahead to confirm.

### Festivals & Public Events

Contact event organizers in advance to ask about wheelchair seating, ASL interpretation, sensory-friendly zones, or mobility parking.

Scout accessible drop-off points and bring an accessibility checklist.

**Hydration & Shade:** Bring your own shaded cover (umbrella/hat), stay hydrated, and consider cooling accessories like neck fans or cooling towels.

### Accessible Travel Tips

**Pre-board & Book Assistance Early:** Whether it's for air travel or bus trips, request accessibility services ahead of time (airport wheelchairs, pre-boarding, etc.).

**Know Your Rights:** Review the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations on the Canadian Transportation Agency website.

**Pack Essentials:** Always travel with medications, documentation of disability accommodations, and a list of emergency contacts.

### Bonus: Summer Safety Essentials

Bring sunscreen, insect repellent, and a medical ID bracelet if applicable

Consider a portable cooling vest or misting fan

Don't forget to pack noise-cancelling headphones or fidget tools for sensory comfort in busy spaces

## Staying Safe and Cool During Alberta's Hot Summer Days

Hot weather poses unique challenges for individuals with disabilities—especially those with mobility, respiratory, or neurological conditions. Here are some essential tips and resources to beat the heat safely:

### Know Where to Go: Cooling Centers

Cities like Edmonton and Calgary operate cooling centers and hydration stations during heat warnings. These





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include libraries, recreation centres, and transit stations.

Call 311 or visit your city's website for current cooling locations. Some disability support organizations may offer temporary transportation or safe indoor space—check with VAD or your local service provider.

### Hydration Tips

Drink small amounts frequently—don't wait until you're thirsty.

Use water reminder apps or set phone alarms.

Avoid alcohol or caffeinated beverages, as they can worsen dehydration.

If swallowing is a concern, consider hydration gels or electrolyte-enhanced drinks recommended by a healthcare provider.

### Mobility & Equipment Considerations

Mobility aids can become dangerously hot—check seats, grips, and metal surfaces before use. Use sun sleeves, seat covers, or wheelchair umbrellas for added comfort.

For powered chairs or scooters, ensure battery life and cooling system are in good condition.

### Know the Signs of Heat Illness

Early warning signs: dizziness, headache, nausea, cramps, excessive sweating or confusion.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Call 911 if someone is unconscious or extremely disoriented in the heat.

Use a cooling towel, misting spray, or move indoors immediately.

### Consider Sensory & Cognitive Needs

Loud fans or bright lights can be overstimulating—use noise-reducing fans and sunglasses.

Prepare a visual schedule or comfort bag for outdoor trips to reduce stress.

## Adaptive Recreation in Alberta

### Local Programs & Opportunities for 2025

**Rocky Mountain Adaptive (RMA) – Bow Valley**  
Offers multi-sport camps ("No Limits Camp") that includes kayaking, guided adventures, and accessible gear rentals. Located at William Watson Lodge, Peter Lougheed PP. Ideal for all ages & ability levels; drop-in or multi-week sessions available

### Steadward Centre (U of A, Edmonton)

Offers academic leader in adapted physical activity & para sport. Programs include wheelchair basketball, fencing, youth camps, plus coaching education; features accessible training facilities and community outreach. [ualberta.ca](http://ualberta.ca)



### Paralympic Sports Association (Edmonton)

Adult programs like Adapted Golf (e.g., Victoria Golf course sessions June/July). Also offers youth & multisport options in Edmonton, Hinton, and Medicine Hat. [parasportsab.com](http://parasportsab.com)

### AdaptABLE Outdoors

Has tailored outdoor recreation programs using adaptive equipment and staff supports

Check their website for upcoming summer activities: [adaptableoutdoors.ca](http://adaptableoutdoors.ca)

### Easter Seals Camp Horizon (near Edmonton)

Offers fully accessible overnight summer camps (zipline, ropes, archery, splashpark). Serves campers ages 6–105, with 1:3 staff-to-camper ratio and on-site medical support. [easterseals.ab.ca](http://easterseals.ab.ca)



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### City of Edmonton Adapted Programs

Has recreational drop-ins like Fit Night, Ready, Set, Rec!, Social Night, plus partner clubs (BeYou Rec, Adaptabilities). Sessions include fitness, crafts, sports, music therapy, and meditation. [edmonton.ca](http://edmonton.ca)

## Indigenous Disability Supports in Alberta

Alberta is home to a growing network of services designed to support Indigenous peoples with disabilities in culturally safe and effective ways. Below are just a few valuable resources:

### Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)

Support Line: 1-844-944-4744. Offers help navigating healthcare, mental health services, and community-based supports.

### Indigenous Patient Navigators

Available through Alberta Health Services (AHS), these navigators assist with communication, cultural safety, and accessibility when accessing care.

Indian Affairs Hope for Wellness number to speak with an indigenous person in the health sector 1-855-242-3310

### Voices from the Community

Elder Leroy Littlebear, respected knowledge keeper from the Kainai Nation, reminds us of the deep connections between Indigenous culture and inclusion:

“The land is a sacred trust from the Creator. The land is the giver of life like a mother... traditional knowledge... are all connected to the land.”

While not specific to disability, his teachings remind us that holistic inclusion must respect Indigenous perspectives on community, wellness, and belonging. The GRIT Program Alberta shared this during Indigenous Disability Awareness Month 2024:

“This month, we recognize and celebrate the

achievements, resilience, and contributions of Indigenous people with disabilities across Canada... Indigenous persons with disabilities face unique challenges... but their contributions are invaluable to our communities.”

### What Can You Do?

**Learn:** Visit Indigenous Disability Canada / BCANDS to learn more about IDAM.

**Share:** Amplify Indigenous disability voices on social media.

**Support:** Partner with local Indigenous-led disability initiatives.

**Reflect:** Consider how VAD and our community can better integrate reconciliation into disability services year-round.

For questions, partnerships, or to share your voice as an Indigenous person with a disability, contact us at: [vad@vadsociety.ca](mailto:vad@vadsociety.ca) | 780-488-9088

## Welcome Yusuf Ariyo to the VAD Team!



Voice of Albertans with Disabilities is excited to welcome Yusuf Ariyo as our second Community Support Worker!

Yusuf comes to us with valuable experience from an inner-city organization, where he supported some of the most vulnerable members of the community. He brings with him a wealth of knowledge, strong connections to local resources, and a deep commitment to equity and inclusion.

At VAD, Yusuf will be helping clients navigate disability supports like AISH, CPPD, and DTC, while also offering personalized assistance and referrals.

We're thrilled to have Yusuf on board as we continue offering our support services across Alberta.



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## Together We HOLD the Power

Have you tuned in to the latest episodes of the Voice of Albertans with Disabilities Podcast? This summer, we're diving deeper into community conversations, accessibility innovations, and personal stories that inspire change.

### Recent Episodes:

"Barrier-Free Living with Red Plaid Developments" – Hear how adaptive housing transforms lives

"Understanding the Canada Disability Benefit" – What it means for Albertans with disabilities

"From Exclusion to Empowerment" – A lived experience perspective on accessibility in education

### We Want to Hear from You!

Have a topic you'd like us to explore? Know someone with a powerful story to share? Email us at [vad@vadsociety.ca](mailto:vad@vadsociety.ca) or call 780-488-9088 to pitch your topic for an upcoming episode.

Listen to all episodes here: [vadsociety.ca/vad-podcasts](http://vadsociety.ca/vad-podcasts)



## Client Success Spotlight: "M's Story"

(Name changed for privacy)

When M, a single parent living with mobility challenges, came to VAD, she was weeks away from eviction and overwhelmed by paperwork. Our team stepped in to help her apply for AISH, Leisure Access Pass, and a local emergency rent subsidy—all within a few days.

"I didn't even know where to begin. VAD treated me like a person, not a problem. I finally felt heard." – M. Today, M is safely housed, has stable income, and is working toward part-time training in bookkeeping. This is why we do what we do—because everyone deserves support, dignity, and hope.

You make these stories possible through your support, volunteering, and membership!

## Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities

### How to Stay Safe During Wildfires and Other Emergencies

Emergencies like wildfires, floods, or power outages can happen quickly and without warning. If you live with a disability, it's especially important to plan ahead for your safety, independence, and communication needs.



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Here's how to create a personalized emergency plan:

#### *Create a Personal Emergency Plan*

Make a written plan that includes:

- Emergency contacts
- Location of shelters or cooling centers
- Medical needs and instructions
- Transportation requirements

Share your plan with trusted family, friends, or support staff

#### *Pack a Go-Bag*

Prepare a "grab and go" bag with essentials:

- Medication (at least 7 days' supply) and prescriptions, Medical devices, chargers, batteries, and assistive tech.
- Identification and copies of health documents, Non-perishable food, water, a flashlight, and hygiene items.
- Earplugs, noise-canceling headphones, or fidget items for sensory needs.

#### *Know Your Evacuation Options*

Contact your municipality's emergency management office to register if you may need help evacuating. Sign up for Alberta Emergency Alerts (app or SMS)

If you use specialized transit (like DATS), ask if they have emergency protocols.



#### **Medical Alert & Communication**

Wear a medical alert bracelet or ID tag if you have a health condition. Use a communication board or card if you are non-verbal or have limited speech. If you rely on a service animal, include supplies for them in your emergency kit.

#### **Build a Personal Support Network**

Identify at least 2 people nearby who can:

- Help you evacuate
- Provide transportation
- Advocate on your behalf if needed

#### **Resources**

Alberta Emergency Alerts:

<https://emergencyalert.alberta.ca>

Red Cross Emergency Guide (Accessible Format):  
[www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)

Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities: Public Safety Canada

## **Disability Pride Month – July in Canada**

*Celebrating Identity, Visibility, and Inclusion*

July is recognized globally—and increasingly across Canada—as Disability Pride Month, a time to celebrate the strength, diversity, and achievements of people with disabilities.

While Disability Pride Month originated in the U.S. in 1990 following the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Canadian communities have embraced this month as a grassroots movement to elevate disability culture, advocate for equity, and foster pride in disability identity.

#### *What Is Disability Pride?*

Disability Pride is about:

Recognizing disability as an identity—not something to be ashamed of, but a natural part of human diversity..

Challenging ableism and the idea that people with disabilities need to be "fixed". Celebrating



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community strength, resilience, and interdependence.

The Disability Pride flag, redesigned in 2021, uses bold colours on a black background to represent the broad spectrum of disabilities, as well as mourning lives lost due to ableism. Here's what each element symbolizes:

- Black Background: Represents mourning and rage for victims of ableism and the ongoing struggle for justice
- Diagonal Stripe (from top left to bottom right): A "cutting across" of barriers and the creativity people with disabilities use to navigate the world.
- Five Colours in the Stripe: Green: Sensory disabilities (e.g., autism, ADHD, sensory processing disorders); Blue: Mental health disabilities; Brown: Physical disabilities; Yellow: Neurodivergence and cognitive/intellectual disabilities; Red: Invisible and chronic illnesses, including chronic pain and fatigue disorders. This inclusive design recognizes the wide spectrum of disabilities and affirms that pride exists across all experiences.

### *What It Means in Canada*

Though there's no formal federal recognition (yet), Canadians celebrate Disability Pride Month through:

- Community events, awareness campaigns, and storytelling
- Art, media, and social media takeovers by people with lived experience
- Policy advocacy for accessibility, health equity, housing, and employment inclusion

### VAD Stands with Disability Pride

At VAD, we believe that disability is not a weakness—it is power, knowledge, and culture. This July, we invite our members, allies, and supporters to:

- Share your story using #DisabilityPride
- Attend inclusive events or host your own
- Challenge ableist language and assumptions in everyday life
- Encourage youth and elders with disabilities to explore pride in identity
- Together, we HOLD the power to change narratives and celebrate disability with pride.

To share your story or artwork for Disability Pride Month, email us at [vad@vadsociety.ca](mailto:vad@vadsociety.ca)

## About the Disability Pride Flag

The flag's design is intentional. The colors represent:

- Red - physical disabilities
- Gold - neurodiversity
- White - invisible disabilities and disabilities that haven't yet been diagnosed
- Blue - emotional and psychiatric disabilities, including mental illness, anxiety, and depression
- Green - for sensory disabilities, including deafness, blindness, lack of smell, lack of taste, audio processing disorder, and all other sensory disabilities
- Faded black background - for mourning and rage for victims of ableist violence and abuse.



*Designed by Ann Magill in collaboration  
with the disability community*

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## VAD's New Board of Directors

Thank you to everyone who participated in our Annual General Meeting.

We are truly grateful that you took time out of your day to join us as we elected our Board of Directors and conducted the important business of the Society at the AGM, June 21, 2025.

### Doug Manderville (President)



Joined the VAD board in 2024, Doug brings over two decades of nonprofit leadership coupled with 30 years of lived disability experience. An advocate committed to fostering inclusion, Doug's unique perspective strengthens VAD's mission to empower Albertans with disabilities.

### Korvn Dver (Vice President)



A proud Fort McMurray resident and stroke survivor, Koryn channels lived experience into advocacy — breaking down barriers and connecting people with resources. Her personal journey fuels a passionate drive to make Alberta more accessible.

### Don Slater (Director)



Since joining in 2024, Don has championed justice, fairness, and dignity for disability rights. Known for thoughtful listening and effective advocacy, he works tirelessly—from private acts to influencing public policy—to uplift voices often unheard.

### Scott Douglas (Director)



Joining the board in 2025, Scott brings 20 years of lived disability experience. As a dedicated advocate for accessibility and equal opportunities, his insight is a strong asset to advancing VAD's mission.

### Arman Amiri (Director)



At just 22, Armany brings a dynamic global perspective to VAD as a newcomer to Canada of Persian and Ukrainian heritage. Living with a spinal cord injury since his teenage years, Armany developed resilience, independence, and creative passion through digital art. Now based in Calgary, he advocates for accessibility and empowerment—especially for newcomers and youth with disabilities. His lived experience navigating systems in a new country fuels his commitment to inclusion, equity, and innovative thinking at VAD.

### Marilyn Erho (Director)



Marilyn joined in 2025, offering three decades of lived disability experience plus a decade in the nonprofit sector. She's focused on promoting inclusion and supporting peers.



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Ali Khalil (Director)



Ali Khalil is an HR professional and accessibility specialist who lives with vision loss. He manages CNIB SmartLife for Western Canada, supporting individuals across four provinces in accessing assistive technology, and also

runs his own business helping organizations ensure digital accessibility. Having lost most of his vision at age seven, Ali brings lived experience and a deep personal commitment to his work. He has supported job seekers with disabilities through CNIB and partnered with organizations like Fable, GrackleDocs, Walmart Canada, and CNIB to make digital spaces more inclusive. Driven by advocacy and a passion for breaking down barriers, Ali is eager to contribute his voice, experience, and dedication to the board at Voice of Albertans with Disabilities.

James MacPhail (Director)



A resident of Duchess, AB, James transitioned to advocacy following a 2007 accident that resulted in paralysis. Formerly in oil and gas management, he now coaches, photographs, and champions accessibility and connection for those with disabilities.

Janae Mercier (Director)



A lifelong Edmonton resident and current Director at Large with the Autism Independent Living Association (AiLA), where she has volunteered for nearly four years. She is motivated to join the VAD board to expand her advocacy work

for people with disabilities, drawing from personal experience as a Métis woman with Asperger's

Syndrome. Her involvement includes participation in disability advocacy events, writing content and launching initiatives like a movie club for AiLA, and volunteering with Autism Edmonton. She is passionate about making a difference—however small—and eager to continue learning and growing as a board member. She has access to technology, is familiar with virtual tools, can attend in-person meetings, and has no issues obtaining a criminal record check.

## Strategic Vision for 2025–2028

The 2025 Strategic plan and the 2025 Bylaws are available for review on the VAD website.

Voice of Albertans with Disabilities (VAD) has released its Strategic Plan for 2025–2028, emphasizing a bold commitment to accessibility, advocacy, and community empowerment. Building on a history of strong partnerships and impactful programs, the plan focuses on enhancing services across Alberta through expanded outreach, sustainable funding, innovative programming, and digital inclusion. Key goals include boosting financial sustainability, advancing awareness and advocacy, improving service accessibility, and strengthening organizational governance. With over 1,700 support calls, 500+ in-person appointments, and dozens of awareness presentations delivered last year, VAD is well-positioned to continue championing the rights of Albertans with disabilities.



## Updated Bylaws Passed

At the 2025 Annual General Meeting, VAD members approved updated bylaws to modernize governance and support the Society's evolving needs. The new bylaws prioritize transparency, regional representation across Alberta, and stronger accountability mechanisms, while ensuring inclusivity remains central to all decision-making.

<https://vadsociety.ca/about/>



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